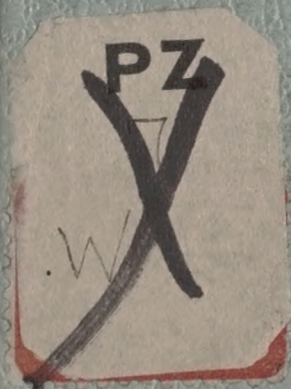
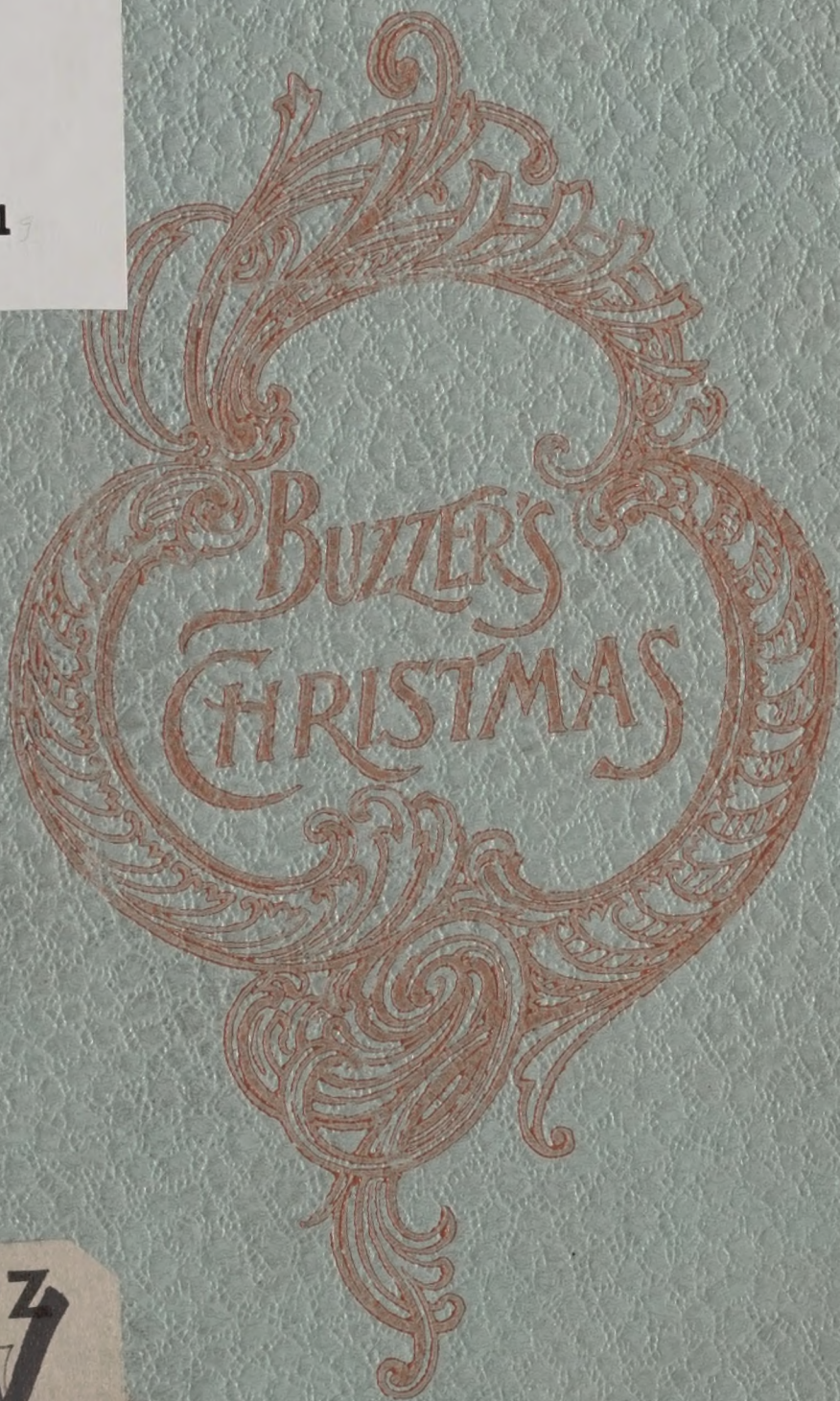
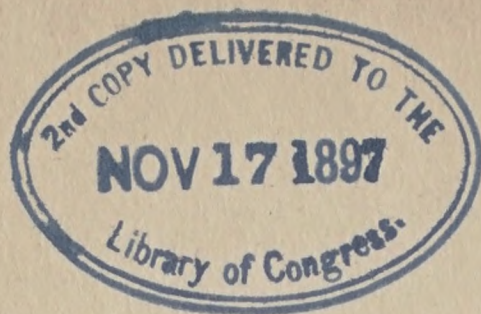


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BUZZER'S CHRISTMAS.

BY

MARY T. WAGGAMAN,

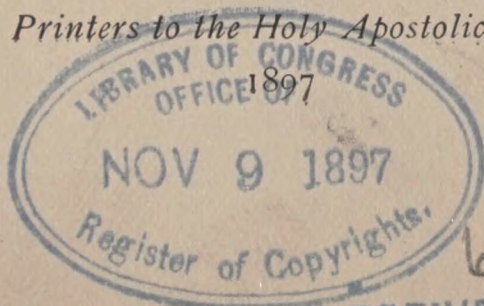
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BUZZER'S CHRISTMAS.

I.

CHRISTMAS was coming—coming—coming. A white Christmas, with his jolly old face peering above a robe of ermine, his brow crowned with icicles, his eyes twinkling with frosty glee. A rousing, merry, hearty, good, old-fashioned Christmas, whose cheery voice seemed already sounding amid the din of the great depot, where huge vans of Christmas

goods were unloading, and jolly groups of schoolboys and girls starting homeward for the holidays. For the very next day would be Christmas Eve, and even the big black engines seemed to have caught the spirit of the time, and were puffing and panting like good-humored Christmas giants ready to whisk off with all the burdens laid upon their grimy strength. A merry, busy, bustling, distracting crowd it was through which Mrs. Bennett guided her two pretty little children and their apple-cheeked Irish nurse, until she deposited them with a sigh of relief in the cosy corner of a parlor-

car. There was no Christmas joy on the anxious little mother's face, though she had looked forward to this holiday for years. It was to have witnessed her first visit to her girlhood's home since her marriage to an army officer, stationed at a distant Western post. She had set out joyfully with her little ones to spend Christmas with the beloved grandmother they had never seen, and had nearly reached her destination when a telegram announcing her husband's serious illness recalled her to his side.

She felt the long return journey at this inclement season would be too much for her children, besides

it would be a bitter disappointment to her mother, who had made every preparation for their welcome, so she had resolved to send them on the remainder of the way with their faithful, but simple-minded nurse.

“Now keep still, my darlings, and be very good. Keep Buzzer in your lap, Norah. Take off your fur collar, Dolly, but don't forget it when you leave the car. Here is the little hand-bag with your tickets and checks. Remember the station is Glenwood, and if mother's carriage is not waiting for you hire one, and tell the man to drive you to the ‘Manor.’ Do you understand, Norah?”

“I do, ma’am. Shure it’s a born ijt I’d be if I didn’t afther the times you’ve towld me. Don’t worry about me and the childher, ma’am ; it’s enough throuble and harrutbreak you have, wid the masther lying sick away off at home, and calling ye back to him. We’ll get to the ind of our journey all right, ma’am, an’ it’s the light of the ould lady’s eyes the swate darlints will be this blissed Christmas time.”

“They will, they will, I know” —and the anxious little mother’s voice broke almost into a sob—
“but, oh ! it is such a bitter disappointment to send them like

this. I had looked forward to this Christmas so long—so long. There is the bell ringing. Kiss mamma, darlings. Be good children, and mind Norah. Grandmamma will love you so much—so much. Take care of little brother, Dolly.”

Five-year-old Dolly lifted a sweet, little, grave face, whose quivering lips told she understood the situation.

“I will, mamma, I will. Don’t cry, sweet mamma. Norah and me will take good care of Buzzer.”

“My baby, my darling baby!” and the troubled mother bent to kiss the rosy little mouth. “Remember he is a little hoarse, Norah,

and don't keep him a moment out in the night air for fear of croup. Tell mother, and she will know how to care for him. God bless and take care of you, my darlings," and the tender voice broke utterly.

"He will—He will, ma'am," said the warm-hearted Norah sympathetically. "Shure wasn't He a babe Himself this howly time? He will take care of yours, niver fear." And then the cars gave a starting jolt, the mother pressed another passionate kiss on each little one's lips and tore herself away, gazing through blinding tears, as with a puff and a shriek

the train gathered up its strength and swept off with her heart's treasures into the wintry distance.

Then did Buzzer, who was a golden-haired cherub of two, suddenly arouse from his absorption of a peppermint stick and realize the situation.

“Mamma! mamma!” and his stentorian wail woke the echoes of the car. “Mamma is gone! Come back, mamma! Mamma——”

“Whisht now--whisht!” pleaded Norah. “It’s back again in a minute she’ll be. Isn’t it lookin’ afther the fine rockin’-horse that Santa Claus is going to bring ye she has gone? Whisht, darlint!

Howly Mother Mary, but he can outscrache the black divil of an injin itself ! Whisht, Buzzer ! See all the gintlemen looking at ye and wondhering at a big man like ye crying like this. Shpake to him, ye alanna"—and Norah turned desperately to Dolly—"afore he scrames himself into croup."

"Buzzer"—it was Dolly's first lispig attempt at "brother" that had given the baby his household name—"don't cry, Buzzer. Mamma had to go to poor papa ; he was sick. And we are going to grandmamma's—dear grandmamma's, Buzzer."

"Me don't want gamma !" roar-

ed the unappeased Buzzer. "Me wants mamma—mamma—my own pitty mamma!"

"But grandmamma is our pretty mamma's mamma," continued the gentle little genealogist. "And, O Buzzer! you know what lovely times mamma had when she was a little girl. You know about the ponies, and the cows, and the chickens, and the dear little woolly sheep."

"Ba-a sheep," said Buzzer, suspending his roar for a moment as he recognized the oft-told story. "Gamma give Buzzer ba-a sheep, gamma give Buzzer pony, but me want mamma—my m-a-m-m-a!"

“Grandmamma will give us everything,” continued little Dolly eagerly—“everything *beauty-ful*, Buzzer. She is going to have a Christmas-tree high as the ceiling, and we will hang up our stockings in the chimney, and Santa Claus will fill them tight full. And grandmamma is going to bake us cookies and gingerbread horses, and let us go sledding and skating; and, O Buzzer! she will be just the nicest, goodest grandmamma in all the world!”

“Dood gamma,” murmured Buzzer, his filial grief fading into a shadow before such a combination of delights. “Me likes gam-

ma, me likes cookies. Give Buzzer cookie now."

"God bless you, thin, take it," said Norah, delving into the depths of her bag and bringing out the coveted dainty, which stopped Buzzer's rosy mouth more effectually than the most eloquent argument could have done, and soon the little pair, with their pretty noses flattened against the car-window, were watching the white landscape flitting by, as if there were no grief or pain or parting in this bright, spotless world.

Such a beautiful world it was, for the Christmas greeting had thrilled through old Nature's heart,

and she had robed herself for the gladdest festival of the year.

Now the train swept through a forest, where every tree stood wreathed and garlanded in snow blossoms ; now it rumbled past a ridge of rock, cloaked in dazzling drifts ; now it skimmed over heights, where the mountain pines glistened in icy armor and crystal plumes ; now it thundered through gorges, where the cliffs were hung with fairy fretwork, and every little shrub wore cap or bonnet of downy white.

Fields were veiled and mountains mantled ; over all that was harsh, or fierce, or rugged, or unlovely

had fallen the tender, pitying purity of the Christmas snow.

“O Norah! look—look at the little birds!” cried Dolly delightedly, as a flock of snow-birds fluttered away in fright at the passing train.

“Aye, aye, look at thim, darlints, for it’s joy and luck they bring,” said Norah.

“ ‘Where birruds come picking the Christmas snow,

There comes no throuble or want or woe.’

An’ it’s naether sthrange nor quare, for they say in the ould counthry that it’s not birds they are at all, but fairies in feather coats.”

“Fairies in feather coats! O

Norah ! tell us about them," said Dolly eagerly.

"Tell about fezzers coats," murmured Buzzer, sleepily nestling into the girl's kind arms.

"Listen, thin, and I'll tell ye," said Norah, who dreaded a revival of Buzzer's lament. "Whin the could winther comes the fairies go into the foine castles they have deep down in the ground. Grand, illegant castles they are, such as mortal eye has niver seen, and the rooms are carpeted with soft moss and hung with lace such as only spiders can spin, and lit with glow-worms in diamond lamps that burn bright as stars.

“And foine times the fairies have, you may be sure, wid barrels of honey they buy from the bees, and naught to harm or hurt thim the winter through. But whin Christmas comes the tendher-hearted little craythurs can't rest. They know all the childher is wishing and wantin' and axin', and they come back to bring thim luck and joy and fairy gifts. But because of the cowl'd and the snow they put on little feather coats, and come back as birruds.”

“Tell more—more about fezzar coats,” commanded Buzzer, whose gold-fringed eyelids were beginning to droop hopefully.

And cuddling up her troublesome little charge, Norah told more simple, Old World legends of this blessed time, while the glory of the sunset faded and the rosy flush of the hills deepened into violet and purple, and night came on radiant and starlit over a world in which there seemed no spot or stain. On and on swept the train, the one fierce, strong, restless thing in the wintry stillness ; on and on, shrieking over the white wastes, rousing the slumbering echoes of the snow-robed mountains, leaping in its slender rail of steel the drift-piled gorge.

Buzzer was sleeping happily pil-

lowed on Norah's arm, Dolly had dropped off into a light slumber in her softly cushioned chair, even Norah was drifting away dreamily to the green shores of her own Irish home, when the stentorian shout, "Linwood ! All off for Linwood !" made her start.

"Glinwood !" she exclaimed. "Was it Glinwood he called, sur ?" she asked of the gentleman behind her.

"Linwood. Yes, madam, this is Linwood," answered the passenger, who was an old bachelor in ear muffers.

"Glinwood, thin it's our place !" said Norah, nervous at the sudden

arrival. "Wake up, childher, wake up. We are to get off here. Put the tippet around your throat, Dolly. Give us the bag. Quick now, or we'll be carried off again. Come, come!"

And quite unconscious of the consonant dropped from her destination, Norah guided her half-awake nurslings to the platform of a busy little station, where lights were flashing, cabmen shouting, porters swearing, and all the excitement was prevailing naturally caused by the arrival of the one night train that honored the place with a stop.

Buzzer, bewildered into silence

for a moment, stared at the stars, the crowds, the flashing lights, and then as the train dashed away, like a passing meteor, he lifted up his voice again and roared. But there was a new note in the roar, an ominous note that made Norah's heart sink.

“He is croupy, as the misthress said. Howly Mother, let me get him out of this freezing night air quick! Is there a carriage here for us—Mrs. Lester's carriage? Ax for it, if ye plaze, my good man, and if it hasn't come get us wan at wanst. It's not here, ye say, thin we must hire wan. I can't kape the childher in this murther-

ing cowl'd. It's to the Manor we want to go. The misthress said ivery one would know the place. Whisht, Buzzer darlint, we'll be at your grandmother's in a minnit."

"She means Worden Manor," explained a bystander. "Cedar Hill, you know, on the South Road."

"Jump in, ma'am, right here," said a cabman. "I know the place. Let me lift in your little girl. And your trunks?"

"I can sind for thim in the morning. Sorra trunk or box will I stop for to-night," answered the distracted Norah, as the little one's croupy cry arose again on her ear.

“Drive on, man, quick as ye can. Let me get the child to fire and hot wather.”

And jumping on his box, the man drove on through white, ghostly, wintry woods, until he reached a great house that rose frowning and gloomy amid a grove of spectral pines.

II.

TEA had been just served at Worden Manor. A grim and gloomy repast it was, although the silver service glittered with a family crest, and the delicate china had been in the Worden closet for at least three generations. But there was no Christmas cheer or Christmas gladness in the great stately rooms that opened into each other like the shadowy vistas of some gloomy dream ; the tall waxen candles burned drearily, as if they

were only melting into waxen tears, while the great hickory log that old Eph, the colored man, had just placed upon the wide hearth sputtered and fumed angrily and positively declined to crackle or blaze. The old hickory, perhaps, felt that his light and warmth would be wasted here on these lofty rooms, where all was the chill, icy grandeur of the Alpine heights that never melt. And the haughty, handsome old lady who sat in her high-backed chair sipping strong black tea with a crested spoon looked as if she had frozen over heart and soul.

Five years ago Madam Worden

had returned from a long residence abroad, and shut herself up in her old home in a grim seclusion, upon which, after a few friendly attempts, no one ventured to intrude. Rumor said that her only son had defied and disobeyed her by a marriage which she could not forgive, and that she had disowned and disinherited him. Her other children had died in babyhood, and handsome, high-spirited "Jack" had been the idol and hope of her life. She had gone abroad that he might have all the advantages of foreign universities and foreign travel ; she had come home alone, stern, silent, embittered, it seemed,

against heaven and earth. Even kind old Father Durant, who, knowing her to have been a Catholic in the past, ventured on a pastoral call, came back with a troubled face. The old madam had sent him word that she was no longer a member of any church, and declined to see him.

So it was that Worden Manor had grown grimmer and gloomier every year. One-half the house was shut up, grass grew on the broad avenue, ivy tangled the closed shutters, the cedars pressed against the barred doors, while in the wing she had reserved for herself the old madam lived in lonely

state, waited upon by the aged negro man and woman who had taken care of the house during her wanderings, driving out sometimes in her closed carriage, but never stopping to speak or smile or bow to any one she passed.

Sterner, grimmer, and colder than usual was the old lady on this particular evening, as she sat at her dainty tea-table, with old Eph at his post behind her high-backed chair.

“What were those boys doing at the gate this evening?” she asked, as she dropped a lump of sugar into her cup.

“Dey cum to ax if dey mout

cut some Christmas greens," answered the old man hesitatingly. "Dem cedars is crowding fai'ly to de souf do', and de wall is rank wif ivy. I thought if you didn't mind——"

"But I do!" she interrupted harshly. "I will have no young ruffians tearing down my shrubbery. Let it be pruned, cut down, burned, if necessary, in the spring, but I will not have a twig touched now."

"Jes' as you say, missus," answered old Eph apologetically. "I jes' thought, long ez 'twas Christmas times, you know."

"Christmas!" echoed the old

madam fiercely. "What have I to do with Christmas? I have had nothing but begging letters about Christmas for the past two weeks. Sunday-schools, asylums, hospitals, poorhouses—it is the cry on every beggar's lips, Christmas! Christmas! Don't say Christmas again to me, do you hear?" and she struck her ivory-headed cane angrily on the floor. "There is no Christmas for me. I hate the very name."

"Jes'—jes' as you say, missus," faltered the old man—"jes' as you say. Lawd! Lawd!" he muttered to himself as he shuffled off to his pantry with the tea-tray, "it do

'pear like old missus was getting wusser and wickeder every day. But I've allus heern it was that way," continued old Eph, shaking his grizzled head solemnly. "When a mother's heart once do turn, it turns harder than anything in de 'arth. Poor Marse Jack! to think how ole missus was sot on him once, and now—now she won't even let old Chloe what nussed him speak his name. Lawd! Lawd! I allus knew de Wordens were hard-headed folks, but ole missus' heart is harder yet. It dun froze to de berry bottom, shuah.'"

And old Eph grumbled on while

his mistress sat with her dark eyes fixed upon the hearth, where the great hickory log still smouldered angrily in his thick bark coat. He had not been warming his heart with summer sunshine for twenty years for any such business as this. No sour-faced old woman brooding over a silent hearth would get blaze or glow from him—no, indeed. And the big log rolled over sullenly, and was just going quite out when there was a quick peal at the door-bell, followed by a lively altercation in the hall below that stirred the dreary stillness like a wintry breeze.

“Let us up, I say,” cried a fresh,

ringing voice—"let us up at wanst, ye black fule of a naygur, and don't be kaping the childher out in the cowl'd. It's expected we are, I tell ye. Where's the ould lady? Whisht, darlints, we're safe now, the Lord be praised! Come on!" And then the door of Madam Worden's especial sanctum was flung open unceremoniously, and Norah, flushed and excited, appeared on the threshold, while pattering across the polished floor came two little fur-robed figures with outstretched arms.

"Grandmamma, we've come; dear grandmamma," piped little Dolly.

“Gamma ! gamma ! My gamma !” huskily lisped Buzzer, catching the old madam’s knees.

For once in her life the old madam was struck dumb. She had started to her feet in rage and wonder at the intrusion, and stood glaring fiercely at the newcomers, while the clasp of the little hands, the music of the little voices, smote her heart with a maddening pang—such a pang as perhaps the frozen lake feels when the first sun shaft pierces its icy breast.

“God be praised, I’ve got thim safe till ye, ma’am !” continued Norah breathlessly, too full of delighted relief to notice anything

wrong. "The black naygur below wasn't going to let us up to ye at all, and the child threatened with the croup, ma'am, so I didn't dare even to wait for their trunks and boxes. Come here, childher, and let me take off yer coats so your grandmother can get a look at yez. It's the long, cowld way they've come to ye, ma'am. Be aisy, Buzzer darlint, till I get aff yer leggin's. It's the lovely supper grandmamma has ready for ye, and the nice, hot bath afore ye're put to bed, and——"

"Ephraim!"—the old madam had found voice at last—"Ephraim!"—and she struck the floor

fiercely with her cane, as the terrified old man entered—"how dared you let these people in? Put them out at once—put them out!"

"Mother of God!" gasped Norah.

"This woman is either mad or drunk!" continued the old madam, trembling with fury.

"Mad or dhrunk!" repeated Norah, her Celtic spirit flashing into fire. "Why, ye outbreakin' ould reprobate, it is mad or dhrunk ye must be yersilf! But God forgive me, mebbe it's some sort of a sthroke the poor ould craythur has had that tuk her wits. Don't ye mind ye sint for yer grandchildher,

ma'am—yer own born daughter, Mrs. Bennett's childher? Ye've been writing for them this twelve-month, Mrs. Lester, ma'am. Och, she is looking at them dumb as a stone!"

"Mrs. Bennett! Mrs. Lester!" A light began to break on the old madam's fury. "I am not Mrs. Lester, you fool! Mrs. Lester lives at Glenwood, twenty miles from here."

"Glinwood!" echoed poor Norah; "and what place is it we are at?"

"This is Linwood."

"Wirasthu! wirasthu!" cried Norah despairingly. "It's all

asthray we are ! Twinty miles away ! And black, bitther night widout. What are we to do ? What are we to do at all—at all ?” And Norah’s wail was echoed by poor little Dolly’s frightened cry, while Buzzer roared croupily over all.

Hard and cold as she was, Madam Worden was a lady still. Mrs. Lester was her social equal, she had been her friend as well in the long ago. Her grandchildren could not be turned out houseless in this winter night.

“ You can do nothing but stay here until morning,” she said coldly. “ I will have a room prepared

for you. Hush, girl—hush, for mercy's sake!" and the old madam put her hands to her ears in desperation. "Ephraim, bring back the tea, milk, sugar, cakes—anything to stop these children's mouths. Let the west chamber be warmed. They will stay here for the night."

"God bless ye, ma'am!" said Norah fervently. "It's the kind harrut ye have, afther all. Ah, but I was the blundering ijut afther all the misthress towld me. Whisht, Buzzer darlint! Ah, it's sthrange and quare they fale in this great, dark house, ma'am! I'll blow up the fire and make it blaze

a bit to warrum thim. An' if ye don't mind, ma'am," continued Norah confidentially, as she knelt before the hearth, "Dorothy has great sinse for a little craythur, and she understands, but Buzzer will scrache himself into a fayver if he finds we are asthray—if ye don't mind, will ye let him belave you are his grandmother just for the night, ma'am?"

The old madam's brow darkened, but she had had a specimen of Buzzer's "scrache."

"Yes, yes," she said impatiently; "tell him anything—anything that will keep him quiet!"

And then, whether it was the

poke that Norah gave him in his ribs, or the grim joke he saw in the situation, the old hickory gave a roar of glee that fairly burst his coat of bark, and went to work in earnest. Good gracious, how he did snap and crackle and blaze ! What showers of sparks he sent flying up the black-throated chimney ! How the old dark, gloomy room seemed to fill with dancing light ! Ah, the old hickory saw his work now, and he meant to do it !

III.

BRIGHTER and brighter blazed the old hickory as Uncle Eph, with a dazed grin on his face, set the table again with tea and milk, cold chicken and jelly, and the dainty biscuits and cakes his mistress always fancied ; and the pretty little strangers, seated on either side of the broad mahogany table, filled the long, silent room with the music of baby voices.

Higher and higher leaped the ruddy flames, while the old claw-

footed andirons gleamed and sparkled, the tall, ghostly mirrors flashed back the glow, even the carved griffin on the old madam's high-backed chair winked good-humoredly, and a big picture over the mantel, that had been absolutely lost in the shadows, started into vivid light.

It was the life-size portrait of a small boy on a white pony, and it caught the eye of the other small boy at the tea-table, who turned restlessly away from milk and cookie at the sight.

“Boy,” murmured Buzzer—
“pitty boy.”

“Yes, yes ; drink your nice

milk, darlint," pleaded Norah, still in a state of distraction at her mistake.

"Me wants to see pony," continued the little fellow, struggling from Norah's lap and pattering back to the hearth, where the old madam sat in grim silence. "Gamma"—and a chubby little hand was laid fearlessly on the old lady's knee—"me want to see pitty boy's pony."

"You can't, child ; it's gone—long ago," was the curt answer.

"Pitty boy gone too, gamma?" asked Buzzer, totally unimpressed by the harsh tone.

"Yes."

Buzzer stood silent for a moment.

There is a brief period of a small boy's life when he is three-quarters angel, as every mother knows.

Buzzer was at that period now, and as he stood in the full glow of the old hickory, his golden curls falling over his flushed cheeks, his beautiful eyes shining like stars, his snowy brow shadowed with baby thought, he looked as if he were only poised a moment by that childless hearth, while he unfolded his wings for flight.

“Buzzer sorry,” he said, doubtless regretting the departure of boy and pony for personal reasons of his own. “Buzzer be your boy

now, gamma. Got more ponies, got more ba-a sheep, gamma?"

"Yes, yes, child; go to your nurse. Here take him, girl," said the old lady impatiently.

"No, no," cried Buzzer, with a favored child's capriciousness; "me don't want Norah, me want gamma. Take Buzzer in lap, gamma," and the petted little fellow scrambled trustingly to the old madam's knee. "Buzzer sick," he continued pitifully—"Buzzer sick down his froat. Bery bad sick, gamma." And the golden head sank back wearily on the supposed "gamma's" breast.

What that touch stirred, what

that little gurgling cry awakened God only knows, but the old madam roused from her grim abstraction with a shivering start.

“The child is sick—ill,” she said brusquely. “He must be put to bed at once. He has croup, and I know what that is, girl, if you don’t.”

Ah, the old madam knew indeed! Far away in the dim past, when her heart was still young and soft, that same hoarse sound she heard now had struck like a knell on her ear. Two little mounds in Father Durant’s churchyard told of the lost battle for two baby lives, whose blooming might have

changed earth and heaven to her.

“God help us, it's croup in-dade,” cried Norah despairingly.

“Let me take him. Buzzer, darlint, come to me.”

“No, no,” gasped Buzzer hoarsely, clinging to the “gamma” so long pictured to his baby dreams as the giver of ponies, the owner of ba-a sheep, the mistress of a childish paradise of delights ; “me likes gamma—dood gamma, nice gamma”—and the soft, little hand patted the old madam's withered cheek—“oo make Buzzer well, gamma.”

“Howly Mother, what will I do

with him ?” wailed Norah, as the child’s voice rose into the barking cry of the dread disease. “ He has it, indade, and me here among the cowl-d-harruted sthrangers, and niver a dhrop of medicine or doc-ther at hand. Ochone, it’s dead he will be afore morning, me baby, me baby !”

“ Oh, no, no !” cried poor little Dolly, beginning to sob in terror ; “ don’t let Buzzer die, please don’t let Buzzer die !”

“ Hush ! hush !” said the old madam sternly to Norah ; “ you are frightening the children to death, girl. Be still, I say. Eph-ram, quick, send Chloe here with

a tub of hot water ; don't wait for the bedroom to warm, let her bring it right here. Then saddle the roan and ride for Doctor James as quick as you can. Tell him I say it's a matter of life or death."

Then began the battle, the fearful battle that so many nurseries know. Norah was but a raw and frightened recruit ; Aunt Chloe, bewildered by the sudden demand on her, could only obey orders, but the old madam was a veteran with all the tactics burned upon heart and brain.

At her quick, clear commands the frightened Dolly was put to bed in another room, and the sim-

ple household remedies were brought from storeroom and kitchen. It was her steady hand that bared the little, snowy limbs, tempered the water for the bath, wrapped soft blankets around the struggling form ; it was to her—this grim, stern, hard, cold woman—the suffering child clung as if he felt she were his only hope on earth.

“Gamma, gamma,” was the piteous little cry, “oo make Buzzer well.”

The doctor could not come ; he was miles away at another patient's bedside.

All night long the battle lasted ;

all night long the old hickory blazed and crackled and filled the room with warmth and glow, and burned his great stout heart away to cheer on the unequal fight ; all night long the old madam fought Death hand-to-hand, as she had once fought for her own.

Once in that dark, chill hour, just before the day, the battle seemed lost. With purpling lips and pinched nostrils the child had flung back his head, breathing only in hard, broken gasps.

“He is gone ! O Mother of Heaven, he is gone !” wailed Norah in wild despair.

“Not yet, not yet,” was the

stern, low whisper at her side.

“Pray now, girl; *you* can pray for the child—and—and his mother. Pray!”

And falling upon her knees, Norah prayed aloud in her simple Irish faith.

“O dear Lord and Saviour, spare our little baby; spare him to the poor mother who trusted him to ye. O Mother Mary, think of the swate Babe who came this howly time, and take pity on the poor mother's breaking harrut. God have mercy on us all, poor sinners, and lave the little innicent angel wid us. O swate Lord, it's the throes of death that is on him

now," cried the poor girl in anguish as the child flung up his hands in a fierce struggle.

Not death, but life. Life had conquered ; and when, in the faint gray of the morning twilight, the doctor arrived in hot haste, his saddle-bags packed with medicines and instruments, he was not needed.

The old hickory was a mere bed of dying embers now, but the madam still sat before the hearth with Buzzer sleeping softly in her arms, her eyes dim with strange, sweet tears, that told the ice had melted from her strong, proud heart forever.

“Ephraim,” called his mistress when her little patient had at last been safely tucked away in her own great high-posted bed, and the sun was shining joyously on a sparkling, wintry world, “here is a letter that must go at once to Mrs. Charles Lester, at Glenwood Manor. The train stops at ten. I want her to know that her grandchildren are here, safe with me. It will not be prudent to move the little boy to-day, so she will probably come here to meet them. Tell Chloe to prepare for company.”

“Ye-yes, ma’am,” stammered the old man in bewilderment.

“You can leave this as you pass

the grocer's. It is an order to be sent to Father Durant's for—for—his poor," said the madam a little awkwardly as she met old Eph's wondering stare. "And — and those evergreens you spoke of may as well be cut down at once. I may wish to open the south parlor. The boys can come and take all they want."

"Jes'—jes' as you say, missus"—jes' as you say."

"And, Eph, I've been a hard mistress all these years. I—I—I'd like to give you a little Christmas gift. Here are ten dollars to buy something for Chloe and yourself."

"Lord bless ye, missus, me and

Chloe nebba found no fault," faltered the old man. "It's only de old woman ; she do grieve sometimes bout—bout——" Eph paused, fearing he had gone too far.

"I know, I know," and it was a dim, dewy light that came into the keen old eyes, "Chloe has had more of a mother's heart for my boy than I had, Eph. Leave this at the telegraph office. It is for Master Jack. I have called him and—and—my daughter home."

"Bress de Lawd !" exclaimed old Eph joyfully. "Chloe—where is you, gal ? Chloe—Chloe—Lawd—missus—jes' you listen now if you

wants to hear dat old critter sing hallelujah."

"Alleluia !" all the world seemed singing it this blessed Christmas time.

For Grandmamma Lester, a dear, delicious, snowy-capped and snowy-curled old lady, who had been in a state of distraction about the non-appearance of her darlings, came over to Worden Manor in a rapture of gratitude and relief, and the two grandmothers, who had been convent girls together forty years ago, kissed and cried over each other in the hall, and were once again Madeline and Henriette.

Then when it was decided in grandmotherly conclave that Buzzer could on no account be moved, even to find the Christmas waiting for him at Glenwood, three young uncles home from college for the holidays threw themselves manfully in the breach and agreed to transfer Christmas bodily and entirely to Worden Manor. And with three young uncles managing affairs the hilarious state of things that followed quite defies description.

Such a bonfire of old hickory as roared and laughed up the black-throated chimney ! such a Christmas-tree as rose in the cor-

ner of the room ! such a rocking-horse as pranced upon the hearth-rug ! such a doll house as towered by the window ! such an array of drums, horns, trumpets, soldiers, dishes, tool-chests as were scattered around everywhere ! It was no wonder the grim old portraits stared down in astonishment and the carved griffin blinked and the “pitty boy” laughed down merrily over the transformed scene, while Buzzer, who for awhile had threatened to disturb the felicity of the occasion by positively refusing to recognize his natural relative, and clinging to the old madam as “gamma,” was at length per-

suaded to compromise by accepting *both*, and held fast to his faith in the gamma "who had saved him forever."

As to the old madam, dearer even than the pretty, dark-eyed children that Jack and his gentle little wife brought to her from their exile across the sea was the sturdy, golden-haired little missionary who had fought his way into the frozen depths of her heart on that bitter winter night.

Every Christmas he comes from his Western home to spend the blessed season with his two grandmothers. And when the poor, the sick, the sorrowing, the sinful are

sent by old Father Durant to the kind lady, who is his right hand now in all good works, he says sometimes with a smile, “ Ah, my good old Madam Worden ! She is a saint now—she was not always. God called her by a little missionary just two years old.”

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